

## Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 8355

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SUMMARY. WITH APPARENT BLESSING OF FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI CHUHAWAN, PHIRAT ITSARASENA, CHIEF OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY'S PRESS DIVISION, HAS BEEN A SOURCE OF RECENT, INACCURATE ANTI-US STATEMENTS TO THE THAI PRESS AIMED AT CREATING THE APPEARANCE OF OPEN CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE US AND THAILAND. WE HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE SO FAR TO MUFFLE PHIRAT AND HIS CONTINUED OUTSPOKEN CRITICISM OF THE US ON SOME ISSUES HAS THE POTENTIAL OF CAUSING SERIOUS MISCHIEF. END SUMMARY.

1. PHIRAT HAS LONG BEEN A SOURCE OF LEAKS FROM THE FOREIGN MINISTRY TO SELECTED CRITICAL NEWSMEN, PARTICULARLY OF INFORMATION THAT COULD BE SLANTED TO EMBARRASS THE US. IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS, PHIRAT HAS STEPPED UP HIS ACTIVITIES BY OVERTLY CONDUCTING A PRESS CAMPAIGN OF MISINFORMATION AND INNUENDO CALCULATED TO PRODUCE FRICTION BETWEEN THE US AND THAILAND.

2. PHIRAT WAS THE SOURCE OF APRIL 21 PRACHATHIPATAI STORY QUOTING "AN OFFICIAL OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS" AS SAYING THAT THE US "HAS NO SINCERITY TOWARD SMALL COUNTRIES WHICH ARE ITS ALLIES" AND THE "THAI GOVERNMENT WANTS THE UNITED STATES TO PULL OUT OF THAILAND BECAUSE IT HAS COME HERE TO ENDEAVOR TO  
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CREATE INCIDENTS IN OUR COUNTRY IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO

INTERFERE." PHIRAT MADE SURE WESTERN WIRE SERVICES BECAME AWARE THAT HE WAS SOURCE OF THE STORY. ASKED ABOUT THE ARTICLE, PHIRAT TOLD THE PRESS ATTACHE HE WAS MISQUOTED. HOWEVER, PHIRAT TOLD FRIENDLY NEWSMEN -- ONE OF WHOM PROMPTLY RELAYED IT TO THE PRESS ATTACHE -- THAT HE WAS "PROUD OF THE STORY" AND THE DIRECTOR OF INFORMATION AS WELL AS THE FOREIGN MINISTER HAD COMPLIMENTED HIM FOR IT.

3. APRIL 22 EDITION OF THAI RATH ATTRIBUTED TO PHIRAT COMMENT THAT THE CHARGE D'AFFAIRES HAD REFUSED, DESPITE A LETTER OF INVITATION, TO MEET WITH RTG OFFICIALS TO DISCUSS US TROOP REDUCTIONS. THERE WAS NO SUCH LETTER, AS PHIRAT OBVIOUSLY KNEW WHEN HE PLANTED THE STORY. PRESS ATTACHE ASKED HIM TO EXPLAIN. PHIRAT AGAIN CLAIMED HE WAS MISQUOTED, BUT LATER IN THE CONVERSATION HE SAID THE STORY WAS "INTENDED TO RELIEVE SOME PRESSURE" ON CHATCHAI.

4. APRIL 30 EDITION OF THE NATION QUOTED PHIRAT AS SAYING "THE US GOVERNMENT HAS NOT RESPECTED THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THAILAND IN ARRANGING THE MASSIVE AIR EXODUS WITHOUT FIRST CONSULTING THAILAND." HE ADDED THAT "THAILAND WOULD IMPOUND ALL VIETNAMESE AIRCRAFT AND ANY ATTEMPT BY THE US GOVERNMENT TO FLY THE AIRCRAFT OUT WOULD BE REGARDED AS ANOTHER VIOLATION OF THAILAND'S SOVEREIGNTY." WE HAD AUTHORITY TO MOVE THE PLANES IN AND ALSO TO START THEIR REMOVAL.

5. APRIL 30 EDITION OF BANGKOK WORLD NAMED PHIRAT AS THE SOURCE OF CHARGE THAT "THE AMERICAN AUTHORITIES HERE HAVE NOT KEPT THEIR PROMISE TO REPATRIATE KHMER REFUGEES FROM UTAPAO AIRBASE IN SATTAPHI AFTER SEVEN DAYS, AS AGREED EARLIER." HE SAID THAILAND HAD AGREED TO ALLOW THE REFUGEES TO REMAIN HERE "A MAXIMUM OF SEVEN DAYS." IN FACT, RTG AGREED TO AUTOMATIC ISSUANCE OF VISAS FOR 30 DAYS WITH POSSIBILITY OF EXTENSION, IF NECESSARY.

6. PHIRAT TOLD AP APRIL 30 THAT "THERE IS NOW A CONFLICT BETWEEN THAILAND AND THE US ON HOW TO HANDLE THE PLANES AND PEOPLE THAT CAME TO UTAPAO FROM VIETNAM. THE THAI GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY STATED THEY WOULD RETURN THE PLANES TO THE NEW VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT, BUT THE AMERICANS STILL CLAIM THE PLANES." CONFIDENTIAL

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7. COMMENT: SEVERAL ELEMENTS ARE PROBABLY AT PLAY IN THESE ATTACKS. PHIRAT PERSONALLY DELIGHTS IN MAKING TROUBLE FOR US. THE FOREIGN MINISTER APPARENTLY EXPRESSES SOME OF HIS OWN VIEWS THROUGH PHIRAT VIEWS WHICH CHATCHAI MAY BE RELUCTANT TO VOICE PUBLICLY AFTER THE PRIME MINISTER RECENTLY SUGGESTED THE RTG OFFICIALS SHOULD BE MORE CIRCUMSPECT IN THEIR DISCUSSIONS WITH NEWSMEN. THE COMMENTS CAST THE FOREIGN MINISTRY IN THE LEADERSHIP OF

SHAPING THAI-US RELATIONS, THEREBY SCORING POINTS FOR CHATCHAI PERSONALLY AND FOR THE FOREIGN MINISTRY IN THE INTRA-GOVERNMENTAL CONTEST TO COMMAND POLICY.

8. WE HAVE AVOIDED FURTHER EXACERBATING THE SITUATION BY PUBLICLY CORRECTING PHIRAT'S MISINFORMATION, BUT WE ARE ATTEMPTING TO CURTAIL HIS EFFORTS. UNDER SECRETARY OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, PHAEN WA NAMETHI, TOLD THE CHARGE D'AFFAIRES THAT HE HAD "TRIED TO DAMPEN" PHIRAT'S NOISOME COMMENTS. IF THAT EFFORT CONTINUES TO BE UNSUCCESSFUL, THE UNDER SECRETARY SAID, THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE "IS TO TAKE DISCIPLINARY ACTION."

9. WE ANTICIPATE, THOUGH, THAT PHIRAT WILL GO ON GOADING US WITH CRITICISM TO THE PRESS AS LONG AS THAT ACTIVITY SERVES AS ONE OF CHATCHAI'S TOOLS OF DIPLOMACY. PHIRAT'S DIGS APPEAR TO BE CHATCHAI'S WAY OF WIDENING THE DIPLOMATIC DISTANCE BETWEEN THAILAND AND THE U.S. AS HE SEEKS TO NARROW THE GAP WITH ASIAN COMMUNIST POWERS.  
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